FROM COPTIC TO ARABIC:
A NEW PALIMPSEST AND THE EARLY TRANSMISSION HISTORY OF THE QURʾĀN

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Abstract

Recently identified on the antiquities market, the Copto-Qurʾānic Palimpsest represents an important artifact for the history of the transmission of the Qurʾān. Because its biblical lower (i.e., erased) text is in Coptic, the Qurʾānic upper text is likely to have been written in Egypt. Hence, it provides us with our first piece of evidence for localizing early Qurʾānic manuscript production. Going beyond the problem of dating and provenance, the present study aims to place the Copto-Qurʾānic Palimpsest in its context of production and to provide a snapshot of the scribal practices of the Qurʾān in the early Islamic centuries.

Introduction

At the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, the medieval author Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/928) reports in his Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif (“Book of Qurʾān Codices”) that it was permissible to erase and reuse the leaves of biblical manuscripts only if these were no longer identifiable.¹ The manuscript under discussion in this article may be a unique vestige of such a practice, known as palimpsesting.

Because manuscripts have always been expensive, strategies of reusing writing materials have been known from antiquity. With the rise of parchment around the fourth century CE, the technique of erasure and reuse, or palimpsesting, became widespread. However, the production of palimpsests still depended on the vicissitudes of the socio-economic context at hand. Palimpsests are attested in different geographical and cultural areas that range from Latin to Greek and Syriac, yet the largest corpus of ancient palimpsests comes from the Egyptian Christian monastic milieu, in particular the monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai. The practice of palimpsesting was likely widespread at the end of the first/seventh century, as evidenced by the fact that Byzantine authorities saw reason to prohibit it. Conversely, palimpsests appear to be very rare in the early Qur’anic scribal tradition, and one may wonder about the causes of such rarity. The history of the Qur’anic scribal tradition during the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries is obscure, especially in Egypt. Let us recall first the historical context. The conquest of this territory by ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in 20/641 ended a long period of Byzantine domination. Egypt, where Greek was the lingua franca and Coptic the common language of Christians, did not suddenly become Islamic. Instead, the new Arab rulers initially chose to retain Byzantine administrative structures and to protect the Church. It is during the second/eighth century that the process of Islamization and Arabization really began to have an impact on the country, in conjunction with the decline of monasteries and their scribal activity. But what exactly do we know about the process of Qur’ān transmission in this early period in Egypt?

According to the Islamic tradition, the Qur’ānic text was officially codified in Arabia, some years after the conquest of Egypt, under the supervision of the caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (reigned 23/644–35/656). On this occasion, several copies were reportedly sent to the garrisons (amṣār) of the new empire. Apparently, Egypt did not receive any of the archetypal codices dispatched by ʿUthmān. Without such an archetype, how did Egypt play a role in the early scribal transmission of the Qurʾān? A further question that comes to mind is whether the decline of scribal activity in the Christian milieu was correlated with the beginnings of Qurʾānic manuscript production in Egypt.

Answering these questions is complex. The amount of Egyptian materials is certainly significant. Hundreds of early Qurʾāns on parchment have been discovered in Egypt during the last centuries. At least 350 Qurʾān copies predating the fourth/tenth century formed part of the deposit located in

the ‘Amr mosque in Fusṭāt (now Old Cairo). Other manuscripts have been collected—or identified—in the Egyptian provinces. One thing is certain, therefore: producing such a great volume required a large quantity of parchment and necessarily had an impact on parchment manufacturing and trade.

Nevertheless, we often ignore the context in which all of these volumes were produced and then circulated. The main reason is that the manuscripts do not contain direct information about their date or their origins between the mid-first/seventh and the mid-third/ninth centuries. The first challenge is hence the chronology of the materials. There is no doubt that hundreds—perhaps thousands—of fragmentary manuscripts produced at the time have come down to us, but none of them specifies a date. The only way to obtain an absolute dating is through radiocarbon analysis, even if this method does not solve all issues, as in the case of palimpsests. The classical multidisciplinary analysis of manuscripts, combining paleography, codicology, and philology, only permits us to reconstruct a relative chronology.

The second challenge is the geography of the manuscripts’ production and circulation. To date, fragments of copies of the Qurʾān have been discovered in many different regions of the Muslim world, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Iran, and Uzbekistan. In addition to the holdings of the ‘Amr Mosque in Fusṭāt, there are three other important repositories, located in the great mosques of Kairouan, Damascus, and Ṣanʿāʾ. All of them are today identified as “genizah-like,” because they housed large collections of discarded sacred manuscripts, as familiar from Jewish practice. The fundamental question arising in this regard is whether these deposits are linked to the sites where the manuscripts were produced and circulated.

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4. This collection has been studied in the frame of the ANR-DFG project Paleocoran (2015–2018). These volumes are now dispersed mainly in the French and Russian collections. A list of the codices Amrensis has not yet been published.

5. The earliest dated manuscripts go back to the middle of the third/ninth century. Those which are dated by colophon are very rare. The earliest one to my knowledge dates from 246/860, found in a manuscript written in broken Kufic (or Déroche’s “new style”) from the Damascus collection (now Istanbul TIEM ŞE 7294). Nevertheless, a number of manuscripts may be dated indirectly according to their endowment’s record. This provides a terminus ante quem, the earliest of which go back to the second half of the third/ninth century. See Éléonore Cellard, “Les manuscrits coraniques anciens: Aperçu des matériaux et présentation des outils d’analyse,” in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye (eds.), Le Coran des Historiens, vol. 1 (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2019), 665–706, 676–677.

Manuscripts are portable objects and some of them may have travelled. In fact, we can identify at least some manuscripts in which a production location is recorded, mostly from the third/ninth century, that were transported away from their place of origin. Moreover, the manuscripts associated with these repositories display a large variety of formats, script styles, and layouts. The fact that we cannot link these material features with a specific provenance reduces our ability to exploit the archeological provenance of manuscripts to identify characteristics of local production. To sum up, there is at present no explicit evidence permitting us safely to assign a script style, a codex type, or a linguistic specificity to a given place of production, even though the combination of multiple features may sometimes reveal connections to the manuscript’s geographical origin.

Under these circumstances, the palimpsest examined in the present article raises the central question of Qur’anic manuscripts’ context of production. Because its lower (i.e., erased) text is in Coptic, the Qur’anic upper text inscribed on top of it is likely to have been written down in Egypt. Hence, we seem to be confronted with the first piece of evidence allowing us to localize early Qur’anic manuscript production. Going beyond the problem of origins, the purpose of this article is to focus on the manuscript’s historical context. Who were the scribes who produced and reused this manuscript? Where did they work? What can we learn about scribal practices and the milieu in which the Qur’anic text was received and transmitted?

From this perspective, the expository order of this article does not follow the life course of the manuscript, insofar as we do not first examine the Coptic lower text before going on to study the Qur’anic upper text. Instead, we commence with the present state of the manuscript, i.e., with the Qur’anic scriptio superior. Dealing with a very fragmentary manuscript, it is appropriate, so to speak, to go backwards in time: we first need to develop a clear idea of the Qur’anic codex to which our fragment belonged before going on to understand the nature of the Coptic text, or scriptio inferior.

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The Copto-Qurʾānic Palimpsest (CQP) and Its Qurʾānic Upper Text

On 26th April 2018, the auction house Christie’s offered for sale a lot described as “nine folios from a rare Late Ḥijāzī or early Kufic small square Qurʾān” of unknown provenance. When consulting the online catalogue two weeks before the auction, I noticed the connection between this “early Kufic” script and a large set of Qurʾānic manuscripts that were the subject of my doctoral research. Taking a closer look at the folios, I suddenly realized that this artifact was actually a palimpsest, i.e., a Qurʾān written on recycled parchment, first used for a Coptic text. Forming, as it were, two manuscripts in one, the artifact thus emerged to be even more significant.

Analyzing a manuscript involves different types of considerations, including the making of the codex, its script style, its layout and format, its ornamentation, and its textual characteristics. Hence, a full description of a manuscript is predicated on the collaboration of multiple independent scholars.

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10. I would like to thank first Christie’s expert team, especially Romain Pingannaud and Xavier Fournier, for kindly assisting me in examining the fragments under ultraviolet light. I am also grateful to my colleague Lorelei Vanderheiden, with whom I managed to identify the first word of the Coptic erased text: muse. Likewise, I am grateful to Anne Boud’hors and Catherine Louis for their immediate collaboration.
Table 1: Textual sequence of the folios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folio numbering*</th>
<th>Christie’s folios numbering</th>
<th>Qur’ānic text</th>
<th>Coptic text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a 1f rev</td>
<td>Q al-Mā’idah 5:40–41</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b 1f</td>
<td>Q 5:41–44</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a 1e</td>
<td>Q 5:44–45</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b 1e rev</td>
<td>Q 5:46–48</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a 1c</td>
<td>Q 5:48–50</td>
<td>Deut 9:5–6a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b 1c rev</td>
<td>Q 5:51–53</td>
<td>Deut 9:14b–16a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a 1d rev</td>
<td>Q 5:53–55</td>
<td>Deut 6:3–4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b 1d</td>
<td>Q 5:56–59</td>
<td>Deut 6:16–17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- -</td>
<td>[Q 5:59–69] missing text (approximately one folio)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a 1a rev</td>
<td>Q 5:69–72</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b 1a</td>
<td>Q 5:72–76</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a 1b rev</td>
<td>Q 5:76–80</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b 1b</td>
<td>Q 5:80–83</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a 1g</td>
<td>Q 5:83–87</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b 1g rev</td>
<td>Q 5:87–89</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- -</td>
<td>[Q 5:89–116] Missing text (approximately two folios)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a 1i</td>
<td>Q 5:116–119</td>
<td>Isa 42:7b–9a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a 1h rev</td>
<td>Q 6:2–6</td>
<td>Isa 40:15–16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b 1h</td>
<td>Q 6:7–11</td>
<td>Isa 40:21–22a; 40:26–27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The folios have been reordered and renumbered following the Qur’ān’s textual sequence.
disciplines. This procedure, however, involves the risk of paying insufficient attention to the links between a manuscript's different features. This is particularly problematic insofar as the scholarly identification of scribal traditions is precisely aimed at revealing connections between these different characteristics. Consequently, the following analysis is divided into two main subsections. The first one describes the manuscript from different vantage points (codicology, paleography, art history, and philological analysis). The second section provides a contextualization of this artifact in the scribal culture of the Qurʾān.

Description

The present manuscript is fragmentary: there are only nine isolated folios of a very thin parchment. All of them exhibit almost systematic damage to the margins, mainly on the left- or right-hand sides. In its present state, the least damaged folio (fol. 9) measures 120 mm high by 131 mm wide, which approximates a square format as stated in the Christie’s catalogue. On several folios, remnants of margins attest that these were once present on all four sides, but in the manuscript’s current condition only the bottom margin is well preserved (17–19 mm). The reconstruction of the text and the lateral margins of fol. 9 confirm that the original format was not square but oblong. I assume that the text block was approximatively 90–95 mm high by c. 150 mm wide at least, and the folio was around 130/140 mm high by 180/190 wide at least, equal to a duodecimo volume. These dimensions are probably not pertinent for drawing parallels with other Qurʾān manuscripts, as they result from the recycling of Coptic folios. The latter’s original size may be estimated to have measured 220 mm high by 165 mm wide (see below). Each one of them was trimmed in the margins, and folded or cut in two, in order to obtain one Qurʾān bifolio. (A bifolio may be “true” in case of folding or

12. This peculiarity contrasts with the thick parchment of the Qurʾāns that I have seen so far.
13. For the other margins, only fragmented areas are preserved: top margin (13.3 mm), right margin (11.4 mm) and left margin (13 mm).
14. The duodecimo is a technical term used by printers and bibliographers for a book size standard resulting from folding a sheet of paper into twelve leaves. The size of a duodecimo book corresponds approximately to 13 x 19 cm.
15. There is no bifolio anymore which could demonstrate the folding of the Coptic folios. Therefore, each Coptic folio was perhaps cut in two sheets and the new leaves stitched together, without any folding. In that case, one wonders why the qurʾānic
“factice” if two sheets were joined together.) The Coptic writing is mainly oriented at an angle of 180° with respect to the qur’ānic script, but exhibits the same direction on some pages (see table 8). The horizontal or oblong (landscape) orientation resulted from a deliberate decision, which gave rise to technical difficulties in binding the quires, as we shall see later.

In view of their textual sequence (see table 1), the folios (henceforth “fols.”) 1 to 7 could be part of a single quire,16 with a missing folio between fols. 4 and 5. Moreover, fols. 1 to 7 show similar traces of damages, unlike fols. 8 and 9. Whether the original quire numbered eight folios (quaternion) or ten (quinion), with one bifolio at the outside lost, cannot be proven today. Regarding fols. 8 and 9, these were probably part of another consecutive quire. Within the mutilated quires, the sheets of parchment are arranged in such a way that at each opening the two facing sides match, in line with Gregory’s rule: the flesh side faces another flesh side and the hair side a hair side. As we shall see in the second subsection, this may be significant for contextualizing our palimpsest.

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16. A quire, or a gathering, means a given number of sheets (or bifolios) of paper, papyri, or parchment folded together to form a collection of leaves (or folios).
As mentioned above, the method of binding the Qur’ānic folios seems very unusual: at the bottom of two well-preserved folios, we can observe traces of the sewing thread (fol. 6, see figure 6) and regular holes (on fol. 9, see figure 7). Hence, the folios were bound at the bottom and not on their right side. We do not know if this binding is original or resulted from a later restoration. However, such an arrangement would have made it very difficult to read the manuscript, as the book would have to be turned 90 degrees counterclockwise to read the text of the right folio, and then 180 degrees to read the facing text on the right.

Paleographic analysis highlights several characteristics of the Qur’ān manuscript. The nine folios were written by the same copyist. The text has eleven lines written per page. There is no visible ruling. The alignment on the base line and the module of the individual letters are slightly irregular. The script’s height is short (the alif being around 8 mm high) relative to the interlinear space (13.8 mm between two ruling lines). This yields a low density of text. The ductus is firmly drawn and has a tendency to angularity. All of these features reflect a professional work.

In light of Déroche’s subdivision and classification of the variety of angular scripts belonging to the vast and heterogeneous “Kufic” category, we are now able to classify more precisely the script style of this palimpsest. It is very close to examples written in one of the angular script’s subcategories referred to as the C.I type, such as Codex Amrensis 26. The latter was

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17. The module of the letters are the dimensions in height and width.
19. The Codex Amrensis 26 gathers folios from Paris BnF Arabe 334b, Saint-Petersburg NLR Marcel 14, Vatican Library Ar. 1605, fols. 40–51, Khalili collection KFQ33, and a fragmented leaf sold in auction (Rennes 2011, lot 156).
however executed by a more skilled scribe than the one who produced the palimpsest. While the script’s module is smaller in the palimpsest, the same interlinear space is maintained in both examples, in spite of their difference in size (Codex Amrensis 26 being a large quarto manuscript measuring 280 x 370 mm).

In its overall appearance, one of the peculiarities of the palimpsest’s script is the unusually accentuated contrast between thin and thick strokes, as the horizontal strokes are thinner than the vertical or oblique ones.20 The vertical strokes (alif, lām, ṭāʾ) are rather short and straight while sometimes showing a slight inclination to the right. This may reveal the legacy of earlier traditions. The drawing of faʾ/qaʾf in the shape of a balloon based on a short and very thin foot occasionally appears, without the distinctive foot, already in Umayyad O.I and C.I scripts and becomes more frequent in further developments of the latter (C.II). The short and thin foot is rather characteristic of the narrow

20. It is reminiscent of some examples classified in O.II, such as those illustrated on Plates 17 and 19–30 in Bernhard Moritz, Arabic Palaeography: A Collection of Arabic Texts from the First Century of the Hidjra till the Year 1000 (Cairo: Khedivial Library, 1905). See also François Déroche, Qur’ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 107–120.
FI group, a hybrid script inspired by C and D types. The most important characteristics of specific letter shapes are presented in table 2.

On fol. 8b, an ornamental headband separates Sūrat al-Māʾidah and Sūrat al-Anʿām. As its left part is damaged, we do not know if it was ended by an ornamental vignette or not. On the right-hand side, the headband stops before the justification of the text, probably because the space was already filled by the last words of the previous sūrah. Regarding the ornament itself, two lines delimit a rectangle filled by a repetitive circular motif, probably of a vegetal inspiration. The drawing is mostly executed with a lightly brown ink, similar to the ink used for the text. However, the central motif seems to have been re-inked with a darker brown ink and filled in with colored inks, mostly yellow with some traces of red.

Let us now look at the textual characteristic of our artifact. As presented before (see table 1), the folios contain four sequences of text with lacunae, as the margins are damaged. The first three sequences are from Sūrat al-Māʾidah, vv. 40–59, 69–89, and 116–119. The last two folios contain the beginning of Sūrat al-Anʿām, vv. 1–11. Comparing the text of the manuscript to that of the Cairo edition, one notes some variants in the consonantal text (rasm) and the spelling of long vowels (table 3). Some of these variants are certainly due to omissions by the copyist. It would only be through comparison to other manuscripts that some of these variants could be established to be intentional.

Several of these discrepancies were corrected by another hand in black ink, identical to that used for separating groups of verses (see below). On many occasions, these corrections completely overwrite the original script, making it impossible to read it (see for example fol. 4a, line 1).

The diacritics were added in three distinct steps. The first one was undertaken by the copyist himself and belongs to the original act of copying. These diacritics are represented by thin and oblique strokes but are very few. Most of these are linked to the major multifunctional tooth indicating

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Table 2: The shape of individual letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CQP</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples of C.I from Codex Amrensis 26 or other manuscripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mīm</td>
<td><em>Mīm</em> has an ovoid form, slightly flattened and moving below the base line. Its tail seems to be drawn in a separate stroke.</td>
<td>![Example Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nūn</td>
<td>Final and isolated <em>nūn</em> form a bend with a well distinguished head (close to C.I)</td>
<td>![Example Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hāʾ</td>
<td>Medial <em>hāʾ</em> resembles a large quarter-circle leaning against a vertical bar that curves to the left. The letter rests on the baseline (similar to O and C.I).</td>
<td>![Example Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kāf</td>
<td>The <em>kāf</em> has a more or less elongated horizontal base stroke in final position. Sometimes the letter exhibits a slanting vertical stroke.</td>
<td>![Example Image]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>The loop of the letter ( \text{fā}' ) or ( \text{qāf} ) (except in final position) is rounded and based on a short and very thin foot. Folio 7b exceptionally shows an alternative form without foot. From left to right: Paris, BnF Arabe 334b (C.I); Paris, BnF Arabe 334e (C.II); LACMA, MA.193399 (FI).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Final and independent ( \text{qāf} ) has a U-ending slightly pushed further to the right in relation to the head of the letter. C.I (Paris, BnF Arabe 334b; 334a; Istanbul, TIEM ŞE12511)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Final ( \text{ḥā'} ) is perhaps retroflex with a bulge (fol. 2a). An alternative shape is also retroflex, but without a bulge (fol. 5a). C.I (St Petersburg, NLR Marcel 130)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Textual variants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Wording according to Cairo edition</th>
<th>Wording according to manuscript*</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(a) Consonantal variants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q al-Māʿidah 5:41</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>faʾḥdharū</td>
<td>faʾḥdarūhu</td>
<td>The final alif of the plural is substituted by the suffix -hu. This variant is unattested in Islamic scholarship. It could perhaps be due to an assimilation with fa-ikhudhāhu a few words earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:54</td>
<td>4a</td>
<td>sabīlī ʿllāhi wa-lā yakḥūfiṣa</td>
<td>[sabīlī ʿllāhi {wa-lā} yakḥūfiṣa]</td>
<td>The waw was originally missing but has been added in black ink. The variant is unattested in Islamic scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:69</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>wa-lā hum</td>
<td>{fa-}lā hum</td>
<td>A connection between original waw and lām has been added in black ink. No report about this variant in Islamic scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:72</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>al-masīḥu bnu maryama</td>
<td>al-masīḥu bnu maryama</td>
<td>The hamzat al-waṣl (alif) of ibn is not written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:74</td>
<td>5b</td>
<td>a-fa-lā</td>
<td>{a-}fa-lā</td>
<td>The alif was missing and has been added in black ink. The variant is unattested in Islamic scholarship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:78</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td>ʿīsā bni maryama</td>
<td>ʿīsā bni maryama</td>
<td>The hamzat al-waṣl (alif) of ibn was not written. It has been added afterwards in brown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:80</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td>kathīran</td>
<td>kathīr{an}</td>
<td>The final alif was missing but has been added in black.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:117</td>
<td>8a</td>
<td>ʿbudū</td>
<td>ʿbudu</td>
<td>The plural ending (waw + alif) is missing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(b) Variant spelling of long vowels

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:73</td>
<td>5b</td>
<td>thālith</td>
<td>th-l-th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wāḥid (spelt with dagger alif)</td>
<td>wāḥid</td>
<td>Alif is present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ilāh (spelt with dagger alif)</td>
<td>ʾ-l-y-h (ilāh) or ʾ-l-l-h (allāh)</td>
<td>A yāʾ or a lām was written between lām and hāʾ but has been erased (the height of the erasure could indicate that the letter was a lām).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:77</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td>kitāb (spelt with dagger alif)</td>
<td>kitāb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:85</td>
<td>7a</td>
<td>jannāt (spelt with dagger alif)</td>
<td>jannāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q 5:118</td>
<td>8a</td>
<td>ʿibād</td>
<td>ʿb{ā}d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Letters in square brackets are missing or illegible in the manuscript. Letters in curly brackets have been added by another hand.

bāʾ, tāʾ, thāʾ, nūn, and yāʾ. Interestingly, we find occasional diacritics on the letter yāʾ when used to form the prefix conjugation or imperfect. However, these diacritics do not appear in cases of disagreement among the canonical readers. For example, diacritics appear on the yāʾ of yuḥibbuhum (Q al-Māʾidah 5:54, fol. 4a), yatūbūna (Q 5:74, fol. 5b), and yuḥibbu (Q 5:87, fol. 7b). Over time, a second and third hand added several diacritics to the manuscript, probably in two different stages. The first one is characterized by brown ink. It is used for adding dots below the letter fāʾ (fol. 3b) and above the letter qāf (fol. 9b), as in the Maghribi tradition. A second step is identifiable by black ink, probably the same that was also used for separating verse groups. Among those black dots, two are placed below the alif maqṣūrah of the verb nakhshā in Q 5:52 (fol. 3b).

There are no original verse separators except once after the basmalah (fol. 8b). One of the later readers, using black ink, added several symbols for
dividing groups of verses (see table 4). In all of these instances, the divisions match the verse counting systems that the Islamic tradition considers as Meccan and Medinan.24

Table 4: Verse separators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Text Description</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Q al-Māʾidah 5:48 (end)</td>
<td>Circle (the drawing is unclear) for marking the fiftieth verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>Q 5:53 (end of the verse)</td>
<td>Alif for marking the fifty-fifth verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>Q 5:73 (end of the verse)</td>
<td>Circle with a small circle inside for marking the seventy-fifth verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Q 5:78 (end of the verse)</td>
<td>Circle (?) for marking the eightieth verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>Q 5:88 (end of the verse)</td>
<td>Circle (?) for the ninetieth verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Q al-Anʿām 6:4 (end)</td>
<td>Alif for the fifth verse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The manuscript’s two readers-cum-correctors also added some case endings, using vowels signs, still in brown ink and black ink (see table 5). Comparing the vowels to the traditional qirāʾāt literature, it appears that none of these additions pertain to disagreements among the eponymous readers of the qirāʾāt tradition. The one exception occurs on fol. 4b, at Q al-Māʾidah 5:57, where the case ending -a added to al-kuffār disagrees with the readings of Nāfiʿ, Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, and al-Kisāʾī.25

It was probably the same readers who added, in brown and black ink, the remnants of words in the top margin of the back of two leaves (fols. 4b and 7b). They repeat the original text, which was written at the beginning of the first line. As this area was damaged at some point, it is possible that the words replace the missing text. On fol. 4b (figure 10), one can read the words alladhīna āmanū (Q 5:56) in cursive script, close to the non-qurʾānic script style of the third/ninth or fourth/tenth centuries. On fol. 7b (figure 11), the last letters of the word taʿtadū are still visible, repeating probably wa-lā taʿtadū (Q 5:87) from the original text at the beginning of the line. These are in a more angular script, written in brown and perhaps re-inked in black.

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The CQP’s Context of Production

The present subsection investigates two main aspects pertaining to the context of production of the CQP. When and where was the Qur’ānic layer written? Due to the lower text being in Coptic, the manuscript must at some point have been present in Egypt. Was this a case of a local recycling? Did the manuscript travel between the time at which the Coptic text was written and the time when the Qurʾān was copied? That seems possible. What does the palimpsest allow us to learn about the history of the Qurʾān at its time of production? I first connect the palimpsest with other manuscripts mainly produced during the second/eighth century. I then go on to explore social and historical issues raised by the document.

In what follows, I provide evidence for contextualizing our artifact within the framework of the written transmission of the Qurʾān. Could such comparisons provide us with an idea of the manuscript’s relative chronology and permit us to localize it? The multidisciplinary analysis of manuscripts emphasizes the existence of different scribal traditions, with a more or less standardized material presentation and a text delineated by philological rules. These attributes were preserved and continuously transmitted for hundreds of years, in parallel to technical transformations and orthographic ameliorations. What are the relationships between these Qurʾānic scribal traditions in both time and space? There are two options: they could derive from one another or they could be geographically connected. How many centers of production of Qurʾānic manuscripts were active in the early centuries? Did they adhere to the same scribal practices?

Table 5: Vowels on fol. 2a.

| Line 4: an oblique stroke in dark ink, above the sīn of an-nās indicates the case ending -a (Q. 5:44). |
| Line 9: A dot under the sīn, traced in dark-brown ink, similar to the text, indicates the vowel i (Q. 5:45). |
| Line 10: A short and thick stroke in black ink has been added under the hā’ to mark kasrah (Q. 5:45). |
| Line 10: Two small wāw in black ink mark the tanwīn ending -un (Q. 5:45). |
| Line 11: A small wāw in black ink marks dammah (Q. 5:45). |
The palimpsest’s features are mainly linked to one widespread Qurʾān scribal tradition, called C.I in Déroche’s classification. This group remains very difficult to identify and we still lack any evidence about its origins and diffusion. However, thanks to recent scholarly efforts, we now have a better understanding of the manuscripts written in C.I. More fragments have been identified, mainly in the Damascus collection, and still await more in-depth investigation. Consequently, the following characterization is to be considered provisional.

From a general point of view, the manuscripts written in C.I belong to a wide and varied scribal tradition. It combines archaisms inherited from older scribal traditions and new aesthetic concepts. The physical aspect of the manuscripts at hand reflects an on-going process of standardization already well advanced in comparison to Ḥijāzī manuscripts, but still incomplete in comparison to the classical production at the beginning of the third/ninth century. In other words, the C.I group is identifiable by a combination of many physical and textual features. The main difficulty in assigning a manuscript to this group is its heterogeneity and variability. This is reminiscent, albeit to a lesser extent, of the variations observed in the Ḥijāzī style or in early types of angular scripts.

The manufacturing of C.I codices reflects a wide-ranging yet well standardized process of production. Apart from the relatively small group of vertical manuscripts in folio size, the volumes are oriented horizontally. This


27. Such as Paris, BnF Arabe 332; Kairouan MIA R38; Ṣanʿāʾ, the *Muṣḥaf* attributed to ‘Alī, edited by T. Altıkulaç, *Al-Mushaf al-Sharīf Attributed to ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (The Copy of Ṣana’a’)* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1432/2011), and the manuscript of Istanbul Topkapı Palace 44/32, also edited by T. Altıkulaç, *Al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf*
constitutes the main difference, and a significant one at that, to the earlier Ḥijāzī tradition as well as to other early angular types, in which the vertical orientation is the most common format. The C.I manuscripts also exhibit a variety of sizes from the very small to the maximum size possible for a leaf made of skin, such as Codex Amrensis 22 (537 x 620 mm). Among them, the quarto size—already well attested in the vertical manuscripts written in Ḥijāzī—is over-represented. At least twenty copies have been found in the Damascus and Fustāṭ collections. Such a number of large volumes suggests affluent patrons and official workshops.

Ancient craftsmen were familiar with different options for making quires. All of the C.I oblong volumes adopt the same rule: five bifolios (quinion) are arranged with the flesh side facing the hair side, with the latter at the outside. Significantly, this rule is also the most common in the manuscripts written in the other early angular scripts, while both rules appear to be attested in the corpus of early Ḥijāzī manuscripts. As a later exception, one small group of manuscripts in A script or close to it—mainly discovered in Egypt—follows Gregory’s rule. The same goes for the CQP. Gregory’s rule and its opposite are commonly distinct according to scribal cultures. Gregory’s rule is indeed systematically observed in manuscripts written in Greek, Coptic, and Christian Palestinian Aramaic that are of Egyptian provenance, while the opposite practice is more popular in the Syriac tradition. Therefore, the relatively high degree of consistency between a script type and whether or


28. That shift from vertical to horizontal bifolios implies indeed a different way to cut the sheets.

29. These are the dimensions of Paris, BnF Arabe 324c.

30. The vertical folio sizes display more fluctuating rules. An individual manuscript can use quires of either four or five bifolios, sometimes three (ternion) at the end of the volume. Within the quires, the arrangement of the parchment can follow Gregory’s rule or its reverse. However, a given manuscript generally maintains a homogeneous practice. The horizontal quarto manuscripts are more regular, except for the Codex Amrensis 25 (mainly consisting of Paris, BnF Arabe 334a and Saint-Petersburg, BnR Marcel 130). The latter differs from similar formats in placing the flesh side at the outside.


32. This group is classified as the “A type” in Déroche’s classification. Hybrid scripts could also be related to this group. See Cellard, “The Written Transmission.” Regarding these manuscripts, the quires could have been either quaternions or quinions. In all cases, they systematically follow Gregory’s rule.
not volumes in that script type follow Gregory’s rule could also be evidence of regional scribal practices in the early production of qurʾānic manuscripts.

Most of the time, the C.I manuscripts have no visible ruling on the folios. Between manuscripts, the number of lines per page varies between fourteen and seventeen, but the number remains identical within a manuscript. The density of writing is consistently high, and the vertical strokes are mostly high (the ratio between them and the interlinear space often equaling 4:5), whether the copies are small or large (see figures 12 and 13). In contrast, the palimpsest shows shorter vertical strokes.

Regarding its paleography, the C.I group belongs to the early “Abbasid scripts” of Déroche’s classification, which already emerged in the Umayyad period. Like the other scripts, the C.I manuscripts are mostly written by professional copyists. No manuscript written by several copyists has yet been identified. The reason for this could be either that copyists worked individually or that the variation between two different handwritings is now imperceptible. C.I’s degree of standardization admits variants, and a single copyist could use different shapes for a given letter. The C.I style could thus be described as a hybrid script, inspired by the ceremonial Umayyad scripts and, to a lesser extent, the Late Ḥijāzī script and other early Abbasid scripts (A and B.I). This would point to the contemporaneity of these script styles.

Colored headbands are a very common feature for separating sūrahs in C.I manuscripts. Ornamentation is obviously a matter of cost and is more frequent in the large formats than in the smaller and less expensive ones. Nonetheless, the small CQP adopts the practice of the large formats, perhaps because one of these served as an exemplar. The ornamental vocabulary is mostly derived from vegetal motives, similar to the textile arts (see figure 16), and based on three colors (red, green, and yellow).

The textual features of the palimpsest mainly reflect those of the C.I group, except for some of the consonant variants that are perhaps mistakes by the copyist. In C.I, the presence of the medial long ā in many words, such as qāla, ʿibād, ʿadhāb, reflects a progressive step in the process of orthographic standardization. On the other hand, C.I manuscripts still use few diacritical dots, in line with earlier scribal traditions. Interestingly, some

33. Apart from some instances of vertical ruling in the internal margin and one horizontal line above the text block in Codex Amrensis 26 and Paris, BnF Arabe 334c, in Cellard, La Transmission, 113.

34. It seems that there is no formal distinction between jīm and ḥāʾ/khāʾ in this script style. However, the entire corpus has not so far been surveyed. See M. van Putten, “A Newly Discovered Letter of the Early Arabic Alphabet: A Distinction between Final Jīm and Final Ḥāʾ/Khāʾ and Its Nabataean Origins,” Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wustā 27 (2019): 112–164.

35. Except Kairouan, MIA R38, where blue is also used sparingly.
C.I copies add more diacritics on the letter yāʾ of the third person imperfect singular, which resembles the palimpsest. An important difference between C.I manuscripts and the palimpsest is the rule of dotting the letters fāʾ and qāf. C.I manuscripts put a dot above the fāʾ and sometimes a dot below the qāf, while the palimpsest—or rather one of the readers-cum-correctors of the palimpsest—follows the inverse rule. This feature could be useful for determining the provenance of the manuscript, insofar as the dotting of fāʾ with a dot below and qāf with a dot above could be evidence of an early Egyptian scribal rule. This system, which still exists in the Maghrib, is only documented by some Egyptian documents from the second/eighth century. Already in 1947, Levi della Vida described it as an “indizio di archaicità.”

It is confined to the group of Qurʾāns mentioned above that follow Gregory’s rule, such as the palimpsest. As stated above, these were mostly found in

36. See BnF, Arabe 334c and Codex Amrensis 26. In the latter, the notation of diacritics represents only 4% of the complete system. These diacritics concern almost exclusively the yāʾ of the third person singular. Cellard, La Transmission, 254.


39. I recently identified the same dotting system in another manuscript written in
Egypt and produced probably at the beginning of the second/eighth century. It is therefore possible that the rule of dotting the qāf with a dot above may help us date and localize the reader-cum-corrector of our palimpsest.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the palimpsest was not vocalized with colored dots, which are a constant in the whole C.I corpus as well as in most of the manuscripts from that period and later. Exceptions are few, such as the manuscripts found in the collection of Seymour de Ricci (1883–1942), purchased in Asyut (Upper Egypt) from a certain ‘Abd al-Nūr. Among the small fragments, BnF Arabe 7199 and 7200 are probably from the same O.II, which is preserved at the Egyptian National Library (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, masāḥif 113). There is no evidence about the origin of that Qurʾān copy. However, its first recto bears a note stipulating that it was endowed to the ‘Amr mosque in Fusṭāṭ in 368/979. That means that it was already in Egypt at that time.

40. An exception is the huge Codex Amrensis 22. The latter was so large and so heavy (more than 35 kg, which is the weight of the incomplete volume today preserved at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah) that it may have been intended for a different kind of use or perhaps discouraged the addition of vowels.

41. Seymour de Ricci provides the provenance of the fragments in his notes (BnF ms. Copte 166).
period and are not vocalized. In other words, the absence of vocalization could reflect a milieu of circulation that differed from that of most of the C.I corpus.

The verse dividers could also provide significant evidence for dating the palimpsest. The latter contains no original verse dividers except for one divider after the basmalah on fol. 8b, but one of the later hands added symbols separating groups of verses. The omission of verse dividers stands in contrast with the scribal practice of the two first Islamic centuries, which always includes them.42 Their absence may be linked with a later scribal trend identified in the B.II, C.III, and D.I script styles, which were probably in use around the end of the second/eighth century or the beginning of the third/ninth century.43 However, it is noteworthy that in these cases the basmalah is never marked as a separate verse. With respect to the addition of dividers for verse groups in the palimpsest, their agreement with the traditional regional systems of the Hijāz reflects a general tendency also observed in the corpus of C.I manuscripts.44

When and where were the C.I manuscripts produced? Both relative and absolute dating methods support a dating around the second/eighth century. A more accurate dating remains speculative, as there are no dated manuscripts from the period in question and we have no idea of the length of time for which the script styles under discussion remained in use. Moreover, the chronology of C.I may have been subject to regional variation.

To consider issues of relative chronology first, the material and textual features of C.I are obviously linked with many other script styles such as Late Hijāzi and Umayyad scripts (O.I and O.II), as well as the early Abbasid scripts A and B.I. It is probable that these script styles were contemporaneous during the Umayyad period. The C.I style certainly continued to be used for a while, but was necessarily affected by progressive changes. How long did it remain in use? To me, considering such an expensive and extensive mode of

42. That is the case for all of the script styles that are more ancient than C.I or contemporary with it and for most of the C.I manuscripts.

43. Of the twenty Qurʾān fragments written in B.II—all of which are small-size manuscripts—that are preserved at the BnF, half have no verse division. See BnF Arabe 329b and c, Arabe 338a, b, c. Special attention deserves to be paid to BnF Arabe 399, a complete Qurʾān with a colophon stipulating that it was made in 182/799 by order of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. This colophon has been contested by Michele Amari and William de Slane. See William de Slane, Catalogue des manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883–1895), 120. Regarding the D.I manuscripts, see in particular BnF Arabe 358b with a waqf colophon dated to 300/913. Among the C.III manuscripts, see BnF Arabe 333c and 333d.

44. Cellard, La Transmission, 310–311.
production to have lasted beyond the third/ninth century seems inconsistent with the developments observed after this point in time.

In recent years, carbon dating analyses have laid the foundations for an absolute chronology of the transmission of the Qurʾān.\(^{45}\) It is worth noting that the object of carbon dating is the parchment and not the ink of the manuscript. What was the time frame between the animal’s death and the writing of the manuscript? We may speculatively entertain different hypotheses. To me it appears unlikely that such an amount of parchment would have been produced and stored for several decades without the intention of using it, although this requires further research.

Two radiocarbon analyses have been performed on samples of C.I manuscripts in recent years (see table 6). The huge Codex Amrensis 22 has been dated to 661–777 (94.8%),\(^{46}\) while the small manuscript Wetzstein 1919 from the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin has been dated to 670–769 (95.4%), with 670–725 the most probable range (59%).\(^{47}\) Both results are consistent which each other and point to a dating between the second half of the first/seventh century and the second/eighth century, possibly to be narrowed down to the first decades of the latter. These results support a historical attribution of the C.I manuscripts to the first half of the second/eighth century.

Finally, it is worth noting that the C.I group, like other script styles, is widely attested within the different repositories known today. Thus, manuscripts written in this script style were attested in the collections found in Fustāṭ (figure 17), the Great Mosques of Damascus (figure 18), but also Ṣanʿāʾ, and even Kairouan. The striking similarity between these copies raises questions about their origins as well as issues regarding the spread of Qurʾānic calligraphy. Did the C.I manuscripts originate from one and the same central workshop, with copies at some point spreading throughout the Muslim empire? Or were some of these manuscript produced in metropolitan workshops and then replicated in provincial ones? This is impossible to say for now.

According to our material analysis, the CQP was handled several times. Among the material traces left by the correctors is the addition of words in the top margin. This minor detail may support an Egyptian provenance


\(^{46}\) Pascale Richardin and Nathalie Gandolfo, Datation par le carbone 14 de feuillets coraniques anciens du manuscrit arabe 324 conservé à la Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Rapport d’étude du C2RMF 25497 (unpublished results, 2013). I am grateful to Pascale Richardin for providing me with these results.

\(^{47}\) Jocham and Marx, “Radiocarbon (\(^{14}\)C) Dating,” 216.
Table 6: Carbon dating of C.I manuscripts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lab Code</th>
<th>Radiocarbon age (BP)</th>
<th>Calibrated Date 2σ (95.4%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ETH-57864</td>
<td>1288 ± 19</td>
<td>670AD (59.0%) 725AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>738AD (36.4%) 768AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SacA 32411</td>
<td>1275 ± 30</td>
<td>661AD (94.8%) 777AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>793AD (0.6%) 800AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of our artifact. The same scribal practice is found in another fragmentary Qurʾān, whose Egyptian provenance is more certain (see figure 19). I shall call this manuscript the “Codex Auctionarius Londinensis” (CAL), as its leaves only appeared on the antiquities market in London between 2010 and 2019. Here again, the auction houses did not provide any information about the provenance of the manuscript.

CAL was likely produced before CQP. The former combines specific features permitting us to identify an Egyptian provenance with greater accuracy. As of today, six isolated leaves of this manuscript are known. Its script style and codex dimensions (approximatively 330 x 230 mm) are very close to examples mostly attested in the deposit of the ʿAmr Mosque but also in other collections acquired in the Egyptian province. A closely similar example are eight fragmented leaves that Seymour de Ricci purchased in Asyut. Diacritical dots placed above the letter qāf are another common feature shared by these Egyptian manuscripts. Based on the textual features of CAL and its textual modifications, we may broadly place its production at

48. All of them have been severely damaged by water and insects, thereby causing the loss of large areas, oxidation, and fading of the ink.
49. Written in a hybrid script between Hijāzī and A script. See Paris, BnF Arabe 330g. Oblong formats in smaller dimensions are also attested: BnF Arabe 326b, Saint-Petersburg Marcel 21/2 and Codex Amrensis 1.
50. Dublin, CBL Is.1615I and DaK MS 247. These manuscripts are very close to Paris, BnF Arabe 330g. See Cellard, “The Written Transmission.”
51. The leaves are today classified as five separate items: Paris, BnF Arabe 7193, Ar.7194, Ar.7195, Ar.7196 and Ar.7197. Actually, they belong to the same quire of a small size Qurʾān (around 170 x 270 mm).
52. Regarding the orthography, the word qāla is consistently written without
the end of the first/seventh century or during the first decades of the second/eighth century. However, CAL was emended several times. Successive readers added modifications of the rasm,\textsuperscript{53} vowels, and sūrah headings,\textsuperscript{54} and then re-inked the text in black, probably after it had suffered water damage.

It is most likely after this water damage that the additions in the top margin were made on the back of Sotheby’s 2015, one of the folios making up CAL (see figure 20). Thus, the words *thumma ilā rabbikum* (Q al-Zumar 39:7) were added in an angular script and in black or brown ink. Unfortunately, we do not know if the other folios contained similar additions, as they have suffered more extensive damage in this area.

One may wonder whether ancient scribes and readers of the Qur’ān followed systematic rules, or rather habits, with regard to restoring lost phrases in Qur’ān manuscripts. The issue still awaits further investigation.

\textsuperscript{53} Attempts of correction of the rasm could have occurred very soon after the writing. Indeed, a reader writing in B.Ib script style, corrected a substantial portion of text.

\textsuperscript{54} A reader used a red ink to add vocalization on all leaves except for fol. 5 and, in two instances, sūrah headings. The latter include a counting of verses that consistently agrees with the Baṣran counting tradition and to a lesser extent with those of the Ḥijāz or Damascus. Noteworthy features of the vocalization are *mīm al-jamʿ*, harmonization of the pronoun *-hu* after *kasrah*, an absence of *imālah*, and the occasional use of horizontal strokes for *waṣlah*. 
Table 7: The provenance of the different folios of CAL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAL</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>Recto</th>
<th>Verso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fol. 1</td>
<td>Sotheby’s 2010(^a)</td>
<td>Q al-An‘ām 6:141–149</td>
<td>Q 6:150–158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fol. 2</td>
<td>Christie’s 2015(^b)</td>
<td>Q al-ʿArāf 7:169–180</td>
<td>Q 7:180–194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fol. 3</td>
<td>Sotheby’s 2019(^c)</td>
<td>Q al-Tawbah 9:48–60</td>
<td>Q 9:61–71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fol. 4</td>
<td>Sotheby’s 2011(^d)</td>
<td>Q Yūsuf 12:30–40</td>
<td>Q 12:40–51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fol. 5</td>
<td>Sotheby’s 2015(^e)</td>
<td>Q ʿṢād 38:76 – Q al-Zumar 39:7</td>
<td>Q 39:7–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fol. 6</td>
<td>Christie’s 2011(^f)</td>
<td>Q Ghāfir 40:66–82</td>
<td>Q 40:82–Q Fuṣṣilāt 41:10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Lot 3, *Arts of the Islamic World*, 6 October 2010, Sotheby’s, London. This folio is now in the Doha Museum of Islamic Art, MS732.2011.

\(^b\) Lot 3, *Arts of The Islamic and Indian Worlds*, 7 April 2015, Christie’s, London.


\(^d\) Lot 1, *Arts of the Islamic World, including the Harvey B. Plotnik Collection of Islamic Ceramics, Part I*, 4 October 2011, Sotheby’s, London.


A preliminary survey of Qur’ānic manuscript folios of various provenances has not revealed any examples of such a habit except for one closely similar instance in Doha, MIA MS68 (see figure 21).\(^{55}\) It is probably not a coincidence that this example, already mentioned in connection with CAL, is also from Egypt.

**On the Economy of Early Qur’ānic Manuscripts**

What can we say about CQP and the economy and function of Qur’ānic manuscripts in the early Islamic centuries? By virtue of its small size and being a palimpsest, it forms material evidence for the production of low-cost Qur’āns. The same applies to many other artifacts.

In recent decades, several early Qur’ānic codices displaying large dimensions have come to light. Manuscripts such as the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus (330 x 240–248 mm), the fragment Birmingham Mingana 1572a (333 x 245 mm) or even the Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest (371 x 280 mm) convey quite a uniform

\(^{55}\) These leaves belong to the same Qur’ānic codex as Dublin CBL Is 1615 I.
vision of the Qurʾān’s physical presentation in the early Islamic period. Some traditions partly support a clear preference for large Qurʾāns. Thus, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib reportedly said: “Do not write small Qurʾān codices” (lā taktub al-maṣāḥif sighāran).56 However, the report also implies the existence of smaller formats. In fact, these large quarto volumes, often described as public manuscripts to be used in congregational mosques, were not the only medium used for writing down the Qurʾān, for there is another type of production that reflects low-cost work that is nonetheless of good quality. Many questions remain with regard to the dating and provenance of these smaller formats as well as their milieu of production. Were they objects of practical use? Did they belong to the private sphere, as Grohmann assumed regarding the papyrus fragment P. Michaëlidès no. 32?57 Since Grohmann formulated this hypothesis in 1958, the corpus of small manuscripts has increased substantially. New artifacts have been published, such as several early fragments from the Damascus repository,58 the Tübingen manuscript,59 or Seymour de Ricci’s collection purchased in Egypt. It is worth noting that most of these small manuscripts

58. Déroche has published two early fragments in vertical format from the Damascus mosque (Istanbul TIEM ŞE 3687 and TIEM ŞE 13316-1), considering them to be slightly later than the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus. He has also commented on small fragments with a horizontal orientation (Istanbul TIEM ŞE 9052 and TIEM ŞE 12827/1), which also present an air of antiquity. See Déroche, Qurʾāns of the Umayyads, 59–59.
59. The Tübingen manuscript MA VI 165 is available online at http://idb.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/opendigi/MaVI165 (accessed June 6, 2020). It is written in a variety of B.Ia script with 18–21 lines to the page. It measures 195 x 153 mm.
have been found in the same places and are written in the same script styles as the large manuscripts, pointing to a common origin. In other words, small and large manuscripts may have been produced in the same milieu.60 As Déroche has put it, “It may actually be that there is no link between size and use, but that it is only a matter of costs [sic].”61

Apart from the issue of size, economic issues also had an influence on the selection of writing surfaces. Papyrus is known to have been cheaper than parchment.62 Was papyrus therefore used to produce cheap copies of the Qurʾān in the early period? It is striking that thousands of Qurʾāns on parchment have come down to us while we have fewer than ten Qurʾān artifacts on papyrus.63 A similar disparity also appears in neighboring material cultures like the Greek one, where surviving papyrus codices become almost non-existent after the fifth century.64 Let us remind ourselves nonetheless that papyrus and parchment are not preserved equally well. Though it may be the case that papyrus was used in a much wider territory than Egypt, the principal region where papyrus was grown and processed, archaeological findings of papyri are nonetheless mainly limited to Egypt. This results from Egypt’s particular climatic conditions, which are sufficiently dry in order to enable papyrus to survive.65 Moreover, after centuries of desiccation, papyrus is easily reduced to dust, unlike parchment. In sum, the disparity just observed may result from accidents of conservation.

The corpus of Qurʾānic papyri raises many issues about their nature and function. Do they indicate the existence of cheap copies of the Qurʾān in the early period? Already in 1906, Josef von Karabacek expressed his doubts about the existence of full Qurʾānic codices on papyrus.66 However, he was aware of only two very damaged fragments from the Egyptian National Library,

60. For further investigation, see Éléonore Cellard, “The Scribes of the Qurʾān: Remarks about the Rules of Writing the Qurʾān in the Early Centuries of Islam,” (unpublished manuscript, October 2020).
61. Déroche, Qurʾāns of the Umayyads, 43.
63. A corpus of seven published fragments has been carefully introduced and discussed by Michael Marx, “Introduction,” in Kaplony and Marx (eds.), Qurʾān Quotations, 1–41.
64. Pasquale Orsini, Studies on Greek and Coptic Majuscule Scripts and Books (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 62.
65. Regarding the Arabic papyri, a few have been found in Samarra, Damascus and Awja’ al-Hafir in Palestine. More were discovered in Khirbat al-Mird in Palestine in the 1950s. See Adolf Grohmann, Arabic Papyri from Hīrbit El-Mird (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1963).
the former Khedivial Library in Cairo. These fragments of a “Ḳurʾān on papyrus,” according to Moritz’s description, were so damaged that they lent little support to the hypothesis of entire Qurʾān codices on papyrus. Since then, however, new materials have come to light and necessitate a reconsideration of the issue. In 1958, Grohmann published two fragments from the collection of Georges A. Michaèlides (1900–1973), which back then was kept in Cairo. The first fragment, P. Michaèlides no. 32 (now lost), was a single small leaf damaged on the left- and right-hand sides. Both of its pages are entirely filled with text, containing Q al-Qamar 54:11–38 (recto) and Q al-Qamar 54:45 to Q al-Raḥmān 55:32 (verso), with an ornamental headband separating the two sūrahs. Grohmann ascribes this fragment to the first century of the hijrah and considers it to have been produced for private use, belonging to “the small, oblong sizes, particularly used for private owners.” Grohmann’s second qurʾānic fragment on papyrus, P. Michaèlides no. 190, dates from the end of the second/third century of the hijrah according to Grohmann. It consists of a bifolio fragment folded in the middle. The qurʾānic text (from Q al-Ḥashr 59:11 to Q al-Ṭalāq 65:4) is continuous on recto and verso, and simple designs separate the surahs. In both cases, we may be confronted with fragments of complete codices or Qurʾān florilegia on papyrus. Unlike the two fragments discussed by Grohmann, two other fragmentary leaves—kept, respectively, in the Leiden University Library, Or. 8264, and at Strasbourg, BNU P. Stras. inv. Ar. 1427—did not perhaps originally belong to codices, but seem rather to be isolated passages written on a single leaf, insofar as their back sides are not filled with text. Last but not least, Naïm Vantieghem has recently discovered the longest Qurʾān on papyrus, located in Hamburg’s Staatsbibliothek (P. Hamb. Inv. Ar. 68). This is actually a remnant of a quire of seven bifolios, which was probably an independent small fascicle containing the complete second Sūrat al-Baqarah.

67. Moritz, Arabic Palaeography, plate 43.
69. Grohmann, 225.
70. Grohmann, 228.
71. This one is a small-size leaf (133 x 107 mm). It has been tested by radiocarbon analysis and dated to 653–766 (95.4%). See the discussion about its dating by Eva Mira Youssef-Grob, “Radiocarbon Dating (14C) of Early Islamic Documents,” in Kaplony and Marx (eds.), Qurʾān Quotations, 139–187.
Almost all of the materials just listed are so fragmentary that we cannot
decide if they were part of complete Qurʾānic codices, fragments of Qurʾān
florilegia, or scribal exercises. In any case, it should be noted that none of
them was found in any of the repositories where thousands of parchment
copies of the Qurʾān have been preserved.

Even since antiquity, palimpsesting was obviously the best option for
economizing writing materials. Technically it was very easy to remove a
text from a writing surface like parchment. Despite the meaning of the Greek
word palimpe̱stos, “scraped” or “rubbed again,” the most common manner of
proceeding must have been a chemical removal, since it is in most cases possible
to resuscitate the buried script. Several medieval Arabic recipes compiled by
the prince Ibn Bādı̱s (d. 454/1062) record that vinegar, citron, yoghurt, and
other ingredients were used for removing writing. Mechanical abrasion was
perhaps used to complement and finalize the work, as prescribed by certain
Latin formulas. As the primary motivation in making a palimpsest is to
economize valuable writing materials, we often observe a size transformation
from the original—or primary—codex to the secondary one. In most
currently known palimpsests, including CQP, a single folio of the primary
codex produces two folios in the secondary codex. Usually, isolated folios
are rotated at an angle of 90° to produce bifolios with a new fold. The fold is
necessary for stitching together the sheets and then the quires.

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74. Roman literature records the chemical properties of inks and mentions
techniques of erasure. Several literary and documentary Greek papyri from the third
century BCE to the third/ninth century CE are palimpsests. See Thomas Schmidt,
“Les palimpsestes littéraires grecs sur papyrus,” in Véronique Somers (ed.), Palimpsestes
et édition de textes: Les textes littéraires (Leuven: Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 2009),
83–100.

75. According to numerous studies of palimpsests, most were washed folios. See,
for example, Jean Irigoin, “Le palimpseste de Sophocle,” Revue des Études Grecques 64
(1951), 443–455, 447. See also Natalia Tchernetska, “Cambridge University Library
Nn.4.8, a Greek Palimpsest Described and Deciphered,” Transactions of the Cambridge
Bibliographical Society 12 (2002), 313–321. See also Roger Easton and Keith T. Knox,
“Digital Restoration of Erased and Damaged Manuscripts,” in E. Gensler and
J. Biella (eds.), Proceedings of the 39th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries

76. Martin Levey, Mediaeval Arabic Bookmaking and Its Relation to Early Chemistry and

Palimpsests (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 7–22, 8.

78. See for example Codex Nitriensis, Codex Zacynthius, or the Mingana-
Lewis Palimpsest, described by Alain George, “Le palimpseste Lewis-Mingana
de Cambridge, témoin ancien de l’histoire du Coran,” Comptes-Rendus des Séances de
of writing of the lower text or scriptio inferior thus becomes perpendicular to that of the upper text or scriptio superior. CQP is however a much rarer case, as both layers are either oriented in the same direction or rotated with respect to each other by an angle of 180°, the obvious reason being that the scribe of the Qurʾān wanted to produce an oblong manuscript.

From a historical point of view, this ancient recycling practice has been noted in texts as old as the third century BCE. It became more widespread with the advent of parchment, particularly after the fifth century CE, in geographical and cultural areas and scribal traditions that ranged from Latin to Greek and Syriac. For instance, the practice of palimpsesting was so widespread among Byzantine scribes that in 692 CE, the Council of Trullo (also named the Quintisext Council) at Constantinople issued a canon condemning the practice of recycling parchment from manuscripts of the Scriptures for other purposes. However, this condemnation did not put a stop to the practice, and more than 20% of the New Testament manuscripts written in Greek majuscule known today are palimpsests. In many cases, several centuries elapsed between the writing of the scriptio inferior and the reuse of the material for the scriptio superior. It is therefore assumed that the books that were erased were perceived to be “obsolete” or had become illegible because they were in “damaged or defective condition.” Among the causes of obsolescence is obviously the evolution of handwriting and script styles, such as the transition from Greek majuscule to minuscule at the beginning of the ninth century CE.

In comparison to Byzantine scribal culture, the Arabic and Islamic world did not produce many palimpsests. We know of a few non-qurʾānic palimpsests, most of them from the third/ninth or fourth/tenth centuries. In


81. All of these fragments come from the deposit located in the Damascus mosque. They were part of the manuscript collection of Bruno Violet, which was removed to Berlin between 1902 and 1908. Before their return to Damascus, some of these palimpsests were photographed. The folder Mss simulata orientalia 6, which gathers these photographs, was recently rediscovered and is now available online: (https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN685013049&PHYSID=PHYS_0003, accessed June 14, 2020). Four different manuscripts are palimpsests with an upper text in Arabic, but only one is Qurʾānic. The others have not yet been studied and clearly identified. Based on their script styles, they cannot have been written before the third/ninth century. On fols. 5r–6r and 9r–10r, the two bifolios are probably from a Christian Arabic text, recycling a Christian Palestinian Aramaic text (fols. 5–6 contain Ecclesiastes 11:2–8 and fols. 9–10 have Luke 19:42–20:6). They have been edited as fragment VI and VIII in Friedrich
addition, there is an earlier document (see figure 22), which is not properly a palimpsest, as the primary script was not removed before the material was re-used. This significant document hails from Egypt (Oxyrhynchos) and is now preserved at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. It consists of a letter in Arabic, written on the back of a fragment of the Latin *Vetus Testamentum*, probably in the first/seventh century or at the beginning of the second/eighth century.82

When it comes to the Qurʾān, palimpsests are even rarer and their raison d’être is perhaps not only linked to economic motivations. Except for CQP, we today know of four other examples, which correspond to less than 0.01% of the entire available corpus of Qurʾānic manuscripts. These Qurʾānic

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Schulthess, *Christlich-palästinische Fragmente aus der Omajaden-Moschee zu Damaskus* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905). I am grateful to Gregory Kessel for providing me with this reference. Folios 11r and 12r are a leaf from an Arabic medical treatise, probably from the third/ninth or fourth/tenth century, also reusing a Syriac text. Lastly, fols. 27r–28r have recently been described by the Coptologist Alin Suciu, who identified the Arabic text as a historical work of al-Madāʾinī (d. 228/843) and the lower text as a fragment of the Gospels in the Fayyumic dialect of Coptic (http://coptot.manuscriptroom.com/blog/-/blogs/sahidic-biblical-text-found-behind-qur-an-palimpsest, accessed June 14, 2020). To these four fragments, we can add three other Arabic palimpsests belonging to the same collection. They were published by Kurt Treu in 1966, based on photographs and/or Violet’s descriptions preserved in the Academy of Sciences in Berlin. See nos. II, VII, and IX in Kurt Treu, “Majuskelbruchstücke der Septuaginta aus Damaskus,” *Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens des Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966). See the recent contribution of Ronny Vollandt, “Beyond Arabic in Greek Letters: The Scribal and Translational Context of the Violet Fragment,” in Ahmad al-Jallad, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment: Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old Hīqāẓī* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2020), 93–110.

palimpsests include the Mingana-Lewis Palimpsest, which contains originally qur‘ānic folios that were erased and reused in a Christian milieu. Others were produced in different contexts. One Qur‘ān palimpsest was found in the Great Mosque of Damascus (figure 23). Its undertext—a fragment of the Old Testament in Greek—was erased in the third/ninth or fourth/tenth centuries to transcribe the Qur‘ān. This is perhaps the only qur‘ānic case, apart from the CQP, in which simple economic motivations could explain the recycling of the parchment.

The reasons of production are perhaps different for the remaining Qur‘ānic palimpsests, all found in the deposit of the Ṣan‘ā’ mosque. This collection appears to preserve at least two and probably three palimpsests where, surprisingly, both layers are Qur‘ānic. The earliest one is DAM 01-27.1 (also called the Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest), probably written in the first/seventh century and rewritten after some decades. The second one (DAM 18-?) has a scriptio superior from the fourth/ninth or fourth/tenth century. Four Qur‘ān leaves belonging to another codex (DAM 01-18.10) probably date to the same period. At the moment, this assumption is based solely on my observations of the UNESCO photographs and stands in need of confirmation. However, all three palimpsests show the same particularities. First, they re-use the format of the primary codex, without any attempt to economize the materials. Secondly, they erase a Qur‘ān in order to produce another Qur‘ān. In other words, the few cases at hand exhibit unique manners of proceeding whose causes would seem to be other than economic. Why is the Ṣan‘ā’ collection so different regarding the practice of palimpsesting? Further study of the few Qur‘ānic palimpsests that have come down to us will be fundamental to shedding light on this issue.

The conditions and techniques of palimpsesting in the scribal Muslim world continue to raise many questions. It is unclear why palimpsests are

83. The manuscript Cambridge University Library Ms. Or. 1287 is digitized and available online (https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/minganalewis/1, accessed June 10, 2020). For the recent studies about this manuscript, see Alba Fedeli, “The Digitization Project of the Qur’anic Palimpsest, MS Cambridge University Library Or. 1287, and the Verification of the Mingana-Lewis Edition: Where is Salām?,” Journal of Islamic Manuscripts 2 (2011): 100–117. See also George, “Le palimpseste.”

84. According to Kurt Treu, the erased text is Esth 8:10–12, probably from the fifth–sixth century. See Treu, “Majuskelbruchstück,” 11–12.

85. The photographs are available in Mss. simulata orientalia 6 from the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (see the link in n. 81 above), 3r and 4r.

86. An extensive bibliography is available for this manuscript. For the most recent overview, see Éléonore Cellard, “The Ṣan‘ā’ Palimpsest: Materializing the Codices,” JNES, forthcoming. See also François Déroche, Le Coran: Une histoire plurielle; Essai sur la formation du texte coranique (Paris: Seuil, 2019), 201–229.
so rare in the Islamic scribal tradition. Medieval Islamic literature provides very little information about the use of palimpsests. Some reports concerning qur’ānic material mention the process of washing (ghasala) or deleting (mahā) the parchment in order to destroy a non-standard text, but they do not explicitly mention reuse of the writing surface. Only the Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif by Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī explicitly says that it was permissible to delete and reuse the leaves (intafa’a bi-ṣaḥīfat ...) of biblical manuscripts, but only if these were no longer legible. CQP is one of the few vestiges of such a practice of scriptural palimpsesting.

II CQP and the Coptic Lower Text

The present section will try to determine whether the palimpsest fragments under discussion originally belonged to a single Coptic codex and investigate their content. Comparisons with other known manuscripts will also be made in order to identify, if not the exact place, then at least a region and a period

where and when they were copied. At the same time, I shall also consider their content and examine how these texts were ultimately arranged and assembled to form a Qurʾān codex.

Codicological and Paleographical Features

First, let us consider the codicological features of our manuscript. The nine folios under consideration all belong to the same Qurʾānic codex. However, before being reused for copying the Qurʾān, they had all borne Coptic texts. Despite difficulties owing to their conservation and the decipherment of their lower text, some conclusions as to the constitution of the original Coptic codex (or codices) can be drawn. Among the fragments currently identified, at least two contain non-consecutive excerpts from Deuteronomy, and two others non-consecutive excerpts from the book of Isaiah. Since it has not yet been possible to identify all of the fragments, the erasure of the text being too complete, we still do not know the content of fols. 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7. There is a high probability that these too are biblical fragments, but without proper identification it remains impossible to be certain.

The first fact to take into consideration is that we are dealing here with palimpsest fragments. On the whole, palimpsests involving Coptic text are relatively few. Even more importantly, the presence of a lower text in Coptic, and a biblical one at that, beneath a Qurʾānic text is a unique case. According to the lower text’s paleographical features, it appears to have been copied around the sixth century. While there are several other palimpsests containing Coptic, either in their inferior or superior layers, only a few are comparable to our fragments, insofar as they show lower texts in Sahidic Coptic of a rather ancient style and are written in a similar biblical uncial. Among them is a fragment of palimpsest parchment from Wadi Sarga, south of Asyut, referenced as numbers 33 and 34 in the catalogue of Bentley Layton. The

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89. The recto of fol. 4 was identified as soon as it was discovered by Anne Boud’hors (CNRS-IRHT, Paris). I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her help and suggestions. I am also grateful to Aude Grazer-Ohara for corrections to the English version of this section.

90. The verso of fol. 9 has been identified by Alin Suciu, who published a brief online description and commentary on 30 April 2018 (Alin Suciu, “Sahidic Biblical Text Found Behind Qurʾan Palimpsest,”

http://coptot.manuscriptroom.com/blog/-/blogs/sahidic-biblical-text-found-behind-qur-an-palimpsest?_33_redirect=http%3A%2F%2Fcoptot.manuscriptroom.com%2Fblog%3Fp_id%3D33%26p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_state%3Dnormal%26p_mode%3Dview%26p_col_id%3Dcolumn-1%26p_p_col_count%3D1; last consulted in April 2019).

91. See table 8 at the end of this section.

92. Bentley Layton, Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library
lower script of these leaves exhibits some similarities with our folios. The underlying text, written in Sahidic Coptic, quotes a section of the Gospel of John, while the upper text, also written in Coptic, contains material from the Acts of the Apostles. Crum and Bell, who provided the first description of this manuscript, date the lower text to the sixth century.93

Another comparable palimpsest is kept at the British Library, London, under the shelf mark Add. 14.665.94 It contains Coptic Old Testament texts (specifically, from Genesis and Numbers) written in biblical uncial, arranged in two columns. The lower text itself is datable to the sixth–seventh centuries while its Syriac upper text, containing extracts from works such as the Martyrdom of Peter of Alexandria,95 was probably copied during the tenth–eleventh centuries.96 This manuscript, which was found at Dayr al-Suryán, was most likely copied elsewhere, namely, in Upper Egypt.97 This is supported by comparing the manuscript, which was acquired by Curzon, with another very similar codex that Curzon also purchased on behalf of the British Library, namely, the Coptic/Syriac palimpsest manuscript Add. 17.183.98 The lower text of this manuscript, written in a biblical uncial that can be dated to the first half of the seventh century, was most probably copied in Wadi Sarga, south of Asyut, in the Monastery of Apa Thomas, as

Acquired Since the Year 1906 (London: The British Library, 1987), 37, 46. See also Walter Ewing Crum and Harold Idris Bell, Wadi Sarga: Coptic and Greek Texts from the Excavations Undertaken by the Byzantine Research Account, with an Introduction by R. Campbell Thompson (Hauniae: Gyldendal, 1922), 32 (no. 8). For a reproduction, see Layton, Catalogue, plates 9.1 and 9.5. The fragment was cropped and in its current state measures 138 x 110 mm.

93. For other palimpsests by the same copyist and also coming from Wadi Sarga, see Layton, Catalogue, nos. 35 and 40: except for the format of the sheets (approximately 100 x 100 mm), which differs from that of the John fragments, the general configuration is the same (for a reproduction, see Layton, Catalogue, plate 16.3). The manuscript in question contains the Gospel of John in the upper text as well as in the lower text. The first description of these fragments was given by Crum and Bell, Wadi Sarga 31–32 (no. 7).


95. For further details on the content, see William Wright, Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838, part 2 (London: British Museum, 1871), 837 (no. DCCCXII).

96. The dates indicated here are those given by Wright, Catalogue, 837 (no. DCCCXII).

97. See Crum, Catalogue, xii.

98. Cf. Wright, Catalogue, 819–823 (no. DCCCXII); Crum, Catalogue, 4–7 (no. 12).
evidenced by the subscription inserted at the beginning of the volume.99 The original manuscript was arranged in two columns of about twenty-five lines each, and contained different Old Testament books (Joshua, Judges, etc.).100

Both of these British Library manuscripts (Add. 14.665 and Add. 17.183) must have travelled, whether before or after their erasure and re-inscription, since it is in Lower Egypt that Curzon acquired them. It is worth noting that the same may have been the case with our palimpsest fragments. To my knowledge, most of the other palimpsests featuring a lower text written in Sahidic Coptic are of a later date than those just surveyed.101 For instance, the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, opposite Assiut, has preserved quite a few palimpsests, but none of them are exactly comparable to our fragments, whether in their underlying writing or format.

Now, could our palimpsest folios come from the same Coptic codex? Some rather substantial books like the Book of Isaiah could extend over several volumes of texts. For instance, we know that Papyrus Bodmer XXIII, which contains the last third of the book of Isaiah (from chapter 47), contained no fewer than forty leaves of papyrus.102 Likewise, another manuscript of Isaiah discovered in the Theban region,103 whose writing shows strong similarities with CQP, seems to have contained about the

99. Regarding dating and discussion of the place of copying, see Crum and Bell, Wadi Sarga, 8–9. I would like to thank Anne Boud’hors who drew my attention to this subscription.

100. It was published in Herbert Thompson, A Coptic Palimpsest Containing Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Judith, and Esther in the Sahidic Dialect (London: H. Frowde, 1911).

101. One can add also a palimpsest fragment recently studied by Alin Suciu. Written first in Fayyumic Coptic, it was reused to copy an Arabic text. This kind of manuscript documents that Coptic manuscripts (or perhaps Coptic copyists) travelled within but also outside Egypt. See Alin Suciu, “A Bohairic Fragment of the Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests and other Coptic Fragments from the Genizah of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus,” Le Muséon 131 (2018): 251–277, and especially 254, 256–262.

102. The text was copied in the fourth–fifth century on a single column of about 24 lines |see Robert Kasser, Papyrus Bodmer xxiii. Esaié xlvii, 1-xlvi, 24 en Saïdique (Cologny-Genève: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1965).

103. Although the provenance of this manuscript’s discovery is certain, there remains some doubt regarding the place it was copied, because its typology makes it unique among the manuscripts of the Theban region. Therefore, one cannot exclude that it has been copied elsewhere.
same portion of the biblical book arranged over fifty leaves of parchment and set out in two columns.\textsuperscript{104} Finally, for the sake of completeness mention should be made of the manuscript M 568 kept at the Pierpont Morgan Library, which contains the entire book of Isaiah in a parchment codex of 68 folios, written in two columns,\textsuperscript{105} and of the manuscript catalogued by Karlheinz Schüessler under the siglum Sa (= Sahidic codex) 41,\textsuperscript{106} which manifestly contained the whole book of Isaiah, written over more than seventy leaves of a codex that was very similar to the previous one.\textsuperscript{107} Interestingly, a second volume followed the book of Isaiah and contained the books of Jeremiah, Baruch, and other prophetic writings.\textsuperscript{108}

As regards CQP’s writing, it is very standardized, even if not always legible. The appearance of the script and its arrangement are homogeneous in all of the palimpsest’s folios of the books of Isaiah and Deuteronomy. Thus, it seems quite likely that the two biblical books might have been copied by one and the same scribe and that they belonged to a single library. However, it

\textsuperscript{104} The dimensions of this manuscript were rather small, approximately 230 x 180 mm, which seems relatively close to the dimensions that may have been those of our palimpsest. A column contained 24–26 lines. If my estimations are correct, the entire text of Isaiah would probably have covered about 150 leaves of parchment (300 pages).


\textsuperscript{106} See Leo Depuydt, Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library, vol. 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 20–22 (no. 12). This is a Sahidic manuscript copied in Fayyum (in the monastery of Saint-Michael, at Toutôn), during the ninth or tenth century. Its typology is hardly comparable to the preceding two manuscripts, not only on a paleographical level, which is distinguished by the use of a Coptic uncial and not a biblical uncial, but also by the size of its leaves (ca. 350 x 270 mm) and the number of lines by column (about 36).


\textsuperscript{108} This manuscript was kept in the White Monastery, but it was probably copied in Fayyum (for further details see above).

\textsuperscript{109} Cf. ms. Sa 42 (Schüessler, Sahidische 1.2, 82–83).
seems doubtful that these two books would have been included in the same codex. This is so partly because of the considerable length of the book of Isaiah, and also because of the way in which biblical Coptic books are usually arranged, with the Pentateuch and the Prophets almost consistently forming separate volumes.

In their current condition, the leaves exhibit both traces that testify to the original organization of the Coptic manuscript and traces that evidence the way in which this was later altered in order to be re-used and assembled into a qurʾānic codex. Based on what is left of the Coptic text and its position on the leaves, it appears that we are dealing with a standardized Coptic codex typical of the period around the sixth century, i.e., with a text organized in two columns, and an upper and a lower margin. Leaves from this codex were then cut crosswise in order to be re-used. This can be deduced from the gaps in the Coptic text and the absence of margins in the fragments’ current state. The oblong half-leaves thus produced (see above) were then erased and re-inscribed with the qurʾānic text. Interestingly, the Arabic copyist kept the original orientation of the Coptic page layout, sometimes using it with the right-hand side up, sometimes upside down (in which case the two texts ended up head-to-tail). This is why it seems likely that fols. 7, 8, and 9 constituted, respectively, the lower (7) and higher (8 and 9) parts of the original Coptic leaves.110 This is evidenced by the margins still visible on the fragments and the traces of preparatory stitching used for drawing the writing lines.

Some paleographical considerations may be added (figures 24 and 25). The lower text of CQP was written in beautiful and, as it were, quite classical biblical majuscules that can be dated approximately to the sixth century.111 Although an underlying script, which is often hardly discernible, is difficult to investigate in great detail, it is possible to make some further observations about the writing. It consists of a regular thick and thin uncial script of relatively elegant shape, with Ꝟ, ꝙ and Ꝡ slightly longer than the other letters and a four-stroke ꝯ. In some instances, the shape of ꝙ may appear a little flattened. Similarly, some instance of the letter ꝳ have a hook that neatly curves back. However, these characteristics are not systematic (for instance, different forms of ꝳ seem to occur in the same fragment) and cannot be taken as a distinctive feature of the script style employed.

The text was written in two columns of 28–31 lines each. Originally, the codex was probably of small size: 10 lines would have equaled about

110. This has been found to be the case only on a few folios, however, and nothing can be said about the others. Although it is possible to comment the arrangement of these folios, it must be kept in mind that they may have been an exception.

111. However, the writing is so erased that to risk a precise dating is difficult.
60 mm, while the intercolumn probably did not exceed 15–18 mm. The ruled column was about 55 mm wide. About 15 (to 20?) mm of the upper or lower margins is preserved, which allows us to estimate the written area for a page of about thirty lines to have measured about 180 mm high by 123–130 mm wide. If we posit external margins of at least 20 mm, the whole page would have measured at least 220 mm high by 165 mm wide, with possible variations between the folios.

Although superlineation and tremas remain mostly invisible, traces of some of these marks can still be distinguished where we would expect them. This indicates that this manuscript was provided with standard diacritical marks. Traces of stitching are still visible in the top and bottom margins of some fragments, where they were used to trace the writing lines (see, for instance, the upper margins of fol. 8). However, in the absence of identifiable ruling lines, the system used for laying out rules cannot be confidently determined. Moreover, we should also keep in mind that the top and bottom margins could have been cropped when the leaves were re-assembled into a copy of the Qurʾān.

The Origin of CQP

Where was this biblical text copied? We do not presently have any direct information regarding the fragments’ place of production, their provenance, and the circumstances of their acquisition. Hence, it is not currently possible to specify where the Coptic layer was originally produced. At most, we can

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112. The dimensions given here are approximate and result from estimates made from the global measurements of the fragments taken at Christie’s by Éléonore Cellard in April 2018.

113. I am not convinced that the dimensions of the writing area are the same on all the folios. Such a variation could imply the collaboration of several copyists.

114. The trema is clearly visible on some instances of iōta; I am less sure of the systematic presence of superlineation.
attempt to limit the scope of possibilities and exclude a number of potential places of production by considering various criteria such as the script style, page layout, language, and writing material. To begin with, the use of Sahidic Coptic suggests that these fragments must have been copied in Egypt. Even if it is impossible to definitely exclude that they were copied elsewhere, since Coptic manuscripts and inscriptions have been found in other countries as Nubia\textsuperscript{115} or even in Damascus,\textsuperscript{116} it remains very doubtful that these fragments were copied outside Egypt, judging by their paleographical characteristics, the dialect they use (Sahidic), and the period in which they were probably produced.

We may furthermore exclude the region of Fayyum as the place at which our Coptic Bible was copied.\textsuperscript{117} Likewise, both the page typology and the writing of our fragments rule out that they could have been copied in the region of Thebes, an area where manuscripts are usually characterized, among other things, by single-columned texts mainly written on papyrus.\textsuperscript{118} Despite evident similarities between our set of fragments and many of the manuscripts copied at the White Monastery, near Sohag,\textsuperscript{119} there is insufficient


\textsuperscript{116}. For the most recent survey of the issue, see Suciu, “A Bohairic Fragment.”

\textsuperscript{117}. This is so because our manuscript is written in Sahidic, which does not correspond to what was customary in the region of Fayyum during the period in question (the Sahidic dialect being customarily used to copy Coptic manuscripts in the ninth–tenth centuries). The parchment manuscripts from Fayyum, when written in biblical uncial, are in principle devoid of diacritics, which is not the case with our fragments. For scripts other than biblical uncial, the question is much more complex. See Anne Boud’hors, “L’apport des signes diacritiques à la codicologie copte,” in Nathan Carlig et al. (eds.), Signes dans les textes: Recherches sur les continuités et les ruptures des pratiques scribes en Égypte pharaonique, gréco-romaine et byzantine; Actes du colloque international de Liège, 2–4 juin 2016 (Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège, forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{118}. See Anne Boud’hors, “À la recherche des manuscrits coptes.” I would also exclude the region of Edfu, from which many manuscripts survive, mainly edited by Budge. See Ernest A. Wallis Budge, Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (2 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1913); idem, Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (2 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1915). The typology of these Edfu manuscripts does not correspond to that of CQP: they are written in Coptic uncial, on one or two columns, and are of a later date (tenth–eleventh century).

\textsuperscript{119}. The White Monastery manuscripts of rather small format bearing a biblical uncial are quite numerous. Examples include a small fragment of parchment (Paris, BnF, Copte 131\textsuperscript{5}, fol. 123), written in a small biblical uncial and containing portions of Deut 33. Another example consists in fragments of a codex, which seems approximately contemporary to the previous one, which is described by Schüssler under the siglum Sa 213. See Karlheinz Schüssler, Das sahidische Alte und Neue Testament
evidence to identify this famous site as the place where CQP’s lower layer was copied. For instance, I was unable to find any fragment that can be directly joined or linked to our Coptic fragments. Moreover, and as far as we can tell from the limited information available (especially for the period under consideration), very few of the White Monastery manuscripts seem to have traveled away from their area of origin, and, when this happened, they only circulated in the vicinity of their original place of production.  

Given that we are dealing with a Coptic manuscript erased to make room for an Arabic upper layer, it is pertinent to draw attention to the fact that numerous Arabic texts testify to a significant Arab presence and activity in the region of Asyut, some 80 km to the north of Sohag. One may point to the documents published by Kahle in 1954 and which came from Deir Balaʿizah, a monastery located 18 km south of Asyut that was clearly part of a community of monasteries. These texts, which include both a literary and a documentary collection, are of crucial interest for the present research. They provide compelling evidence that the monastery of Deir Balaʿizah maintained a close, interactive relationship with Arabic-speaking circles as early as 675. Moreover, a number of manuscripts hailing from this monastery exhibit similarities with our fragments. Not far from Balaʿizah,
the Apa Thomas Monastery that was excavated in the early twentieth century at Wadi Sarga also testifies to the intense cultural and religious activity that took place in the region—a region which, in light of the preceding, constitutes one of the plausible candidates for our fragments’ site of production.¹²⁵

There are other sites along the Nile Valley and in the vicinity of Cairo whose literary production is well documented. They include Saqqarah and the monastery of Saint Jeremiah, to quote only one example.¹²⁶ This monastery would also constitute a very credible candidate considering its period of activity, its history, and its difficult relationships with the Arab administration. The fact that several literary manuscripts originating from Saqqara were copied at the same time as the lower layer of CQP confirms that this period was particularly active in the production of books.¹²⁷ However, as far as can be

¹²⁵. Wadi Sarga is, moreover, the origin of some ancient fragments (fifth–seventh centuries) of the Book of Isaiah, described by Crum and Bell, Wadi Sarga, 30 (no. 3). See also Schüssler, Sahidische 2.2, 24–25, Sa 191. On Wadi Sarga, see also above.

¹²⁶. The lot of documentary papyri that he transmitted to us is mainly preserved in the Louvre Museum and was published by Eugène Révillout in “Huit papyrus coptes du musée égyptien du Louvre, provenant du Monastère de Saint-Jérémie de Memphis, et relatifs aux impôts de l’empire Byzantin,” Supplément aux mémoires du congrès international des orientalistes, 1ère session Paris 1873 (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1879): 55–68, 471–524; and Actes et contrats des musées égyptiens de Boulaq et du Louvre (Paris: Vieweg, 1876), and “Un nouveau papyrus copte du monastère de Saint-Jérémie de Memphis,” Revue orientale et américaine, n. s. 1 (1877): 73–79.

¹²⁷. In Dublin three of the five entire volumes coming from this monastery are preserved. They were acquired in 1924 by Chester Beatty: P. Chester Beatty 2003 (= 813): Epistles of Paul, John (cf. Schüssler, Sa 505); P. Chester Beatty 2004 (= 814): Acts, John (Herbert Thompson [ed.], The Coptic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and The Pauline Epistles in the Sahidic Dialect [Cambridge: University Press, 1932]; cf. Schüssler, Sa 506); P. Chester Beatty 2005 (= 815): Psalms 1–50 (Thompson [ed.], The Coptic Version, 89–249; cf. Schüssler, Sa 80). These manuscripts are datable, thanks to their context of discovery, to between the end of the sixth and the first half of the seventh centuries; they were copied at the monastery of Saint Jeremiah according to their colophons. Two other volumes bring to five the codices actually known as having been copied in this monastery. They are currently the property of the Michigan University Library. P. Mich. 167 (Psalms 51–151) represents the second volume of the lot it formed with P. Chester Beatty 815 (but the two volumes were copied by different copyists; cf. Schüssler, Sa 81). P. Mich. 166 contains various writings such as the response of Christ to the King of Edessa, the epistles of Paul of Tamma, the letter of Abgar, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Ruth. The latter is partially edited in William H. Worrell, Coptic Texts in the University of Michigan Collection (Ann Arbor: The
assessed today, the typology of the Saqqarah manuscripts, which are usually arranged in a single column, is dissimilar to that of our palimpsest fragments.

I will not examine the many other possibilities for CQP’s ultimate provenance but conclude by underlining that the region of Middle Egypt (in its wider sense, from around Abydos to about Hermopolis) remains the most probable region of origin. In any case, it is important to bear in mind that the leaves may well have travelled before having been reused as writing surface for the Qurʾānic text.128

The Coptic Layer of CQP

The following provides an edition of the palimpsest’s Isaiah fragments. Most of these are barely legible.129 Consequently, it will not be possible here to undertake a complete edition of all relevant leaves. Instead, I shall present two of them in detail, thus enabling the reader to form an impression of their overall content, of their textual variants (where it has been possible to identify them), and of the page organization as far the latter could be reconstructed. This reconstruction is based on an approximate estimation of the number of missing characters per line and of the number of missing lines expected in the palimpsest’s gaps.

Let us begin with fol. 8, containing Isa 42:7a–9a and Isa 42:23–24. This folio corresponds to the top inner part of a leaf. The Coptic text is written upside down compared to the Arabic text.130 The folio has kept most of its intercolumn, which is still discernible through the traces of pricking that appear in the top margin. The outer column, conversely, has almost completely disappeared. It is interesting to note that for this folio, the top of the Coptic page was in fact the bottom of the Arabic one. This means that the top margin of the Coptic fragment is the part which was stitched to assemble the Qurʾānic codex, perhaps with the help of the stub of another fragment.

The relatively higher degree of legibility of fol. 8 enables some observations to be made regarding the physical layout of the writing. Taking into account the amount of text that is missing, the Coptic manuscript was probably composed of leaves arranged in two columns of about 26–30 lines

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128. We know, for instance, that a lot of manuscripts copied in Fayyum were brought to the White Monastery, and that some Coptic manuscripts copied in Dayr al-Suryān were reused elsewhere in Egypt or outside Egypt.

129. I was unable to go to London to examine the folios and had to work on the basis of the photographs provided by Christie’s.

130. See table 1 for details on the content of each fragment and the orientation of the writing compared to the Arabic one.

each. In most cases, these lines contained 13–15 letters, although in some cases the letter count is 12 or 16. Where the condition of the manuscript is good enough, one can distinguish traces of what seems to have been standard superlineation and tremas above the letter ιωλα.

The content of fol. 8 is of particular interest as it provides us, on the recto, with the relatively rare verses 7–9 of chapter 42 of Isaiah in Coptic. Indeed, with the exception of the London fragment BL Or. 3579A (30), fol. 3
which also quotes Isa 42:7, only one other manuscript—which is more or less coeval with the London fragment, and was probably copied in the same scriptorium—contains this passage of Isaiah: the manuscript New York Pierpont Morgan M568 (= ms. M), which provides the only complete version known to date of the book of Isaiah in Coptic. It has to be noted that these three copies of v. 7 differ slightly between one manuscript and another and that, in this respect, our palimpsest is more similar to Sa 41 than to the New York manuscript. In the absence of verses 8 and 9 in Sa 41, however, comparisons are limited for these verses to the New York manuscript. Based on the only legible sections of our palimpsest folio, the text can be reconstructed as follows:

Isa 42:7

\[\text{ⲗⲉ · \text{ⲉⲉⲓⲛⲉ · \text{ⲉ̣ⲃⲗ ⛅ⲛ \[b l\]ind, to bring}}\]
\[\text{ⲛ̣ⲧ̣ⲙ̣ⲏ̣ⲣ̣ ϩ̣ⲛ̣ ϩ̣ⲉ̣ⲛ̣ⲥ̣ⲛ̣ⲁ̣ⲩ̣ϩ̣ \cdot the bounds out of bonds,}^{133}\]
\[\text{ⲁ̣ⲩ̣ⲱ̣ ϛⲛ̣ⲧϩⲙⲟⲟⲥ ϩⲙ̅ ϡ̣ⲏ̣ⲓ̣ the darkness out of the prison} \]
42:8

\[\text{ⲫⲦⲓ \text{ⲥⲟⲓⲥ ⲫⲟⲩⲧⲥ ϛⲛ} \cdot \text{am the Lord God}; \]
\[\text{ⲡ̣ⲏ} \cdot \text{ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ \[t\]he bounds out of bonds,}^{133}\]
\[\text{ⲡ̣ⲁⲓ} \cdot \text{ⲡ̣ⲉ \· \text{ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ \[t\]he bounds out of bonds,}^{133}\]
\[\text{Ⲩⲱ \· \text{ⲧⲓⲥ recursively \[t\]he bounds out of bonds,}^{133}\]

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131. See Crum, *Catalogue*, 13 (no. 43). Edited in Joel Schleifer, “Sahidische Bibel-Fragmente aus dem British Museum zu London,” *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien: Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 162.6 (1909): 1–38, 12. This leaf belonged to a White Monastery’s codex which, according to the reconstruction proposed by Schüssler, *Sahidische 1.2, 74–81*, as Sa 41, contained, on at least nine quires, the whole book of Isaiah. It was probably copied in Fayyum, in the Toutôn scriptorium, according to its appearance and the use it makes of diacritical marks, and dates to the ninth–tenth century. On the identification of this scriptorium as a place of copying according to internal criteria, see Chièmi Nakano, “Indices d’une chronologie relative des manuscrits coptes copiés à Toutôn (Fayoum),” *Journal of Coptic Studies* 8 (2006): 147–159.

132. I should like to highlight the uncertainty of my reading. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that there was an additional line above the first line here edited, but I have been unable to decide whether the traces that seem to appear here are those of a line of text, if they are due to the state of the manuscript, or if they only constitute a sort of optical illusion generated by potential ink dumps or various stains. They could also be the sort of marks that are usually found in a top margin, namely, pagination traces, the signature of the quire, or decoration related to the position of the leaf at the center, beginning, or end of the quire. The present translation is mostly based on the recent one published in Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint, and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). However, I depart from it in line with the Coptic text.

133. Variant: “of their bonds,” according to ms. M.
Despite being almost entirely illegible, the verso of fol. 8 features a clear mention of the name of Jacob as well as some of the letters of the surrounding words. This allows us to identify on the verso a quotation of Isa 42:23–24. In addition, a few barely legible letters located above the horizontal decoration band give a hint as to the words that belonged to the preceding verse (namely, v. 22b). Column b on the verso would thus be expected to start with the following text:134

[22b ΔΥΨ ΔΥΨΠΔΕ ΕΥΨΔΛ ΕΜΗ ΠΕΣΘΟΥΜ ΜΗΟΥΥ ΗΤΩΡΠ ΔΥΨ ΜΗ ΠΕΣΨ ΜΗΟΥ ΧΕ ΚΑΒΥ ΕΣΡΑ 23 ΜΗ ΠΕΣΘΥΝΥ ΠΕΣΘΑΨΤΗΜ ΕΙΝΑ ΣΩΘ ΕΙΝΕΘΗΥ 24 ΜΗ ΠΕΠΙ | ΤΑΚΠ ΔΥΨΠΔΕ ΣΥΤΨΠΙ | ΔΥΨ ΠΗΛ ΠΝΕΨΤΨΠΙΑ | ΜΗΟΥ ΜΗ ΠΕΣΘΥΤΕ | ΑΝ ΠΕ ΠΕΣΗ | ΚΡΠΟΤΕ | ΕΡΟΠΙ ΛΥΨ ΜΠΠΟΥΨ] | ΕΜΟΟΥΕ ΔΙ ΝΕΨ ΔΙΟΟΥΕ | ΟΥΔΕ ΕΓΘΤΗΜ ΕΝΕΨΙΟΨΗΜ ΟΥΣ |

[22b they have become plunder, and there was no one to rescue the prey, and no one who says, “Restore!” 23 Who is there among you that will give ear to these things, that will listen for the things to come? 24 Who gave Jacob for spoil, and Israel to those who plundered him? Was it not God, against whom he [sin]ned? And th[ey would] not [walk in his ways nor hear his law?

Let us move on to fol. 9, containing Isa 40:15–16 (?), 40:21–25, and 40:26–27. If, as is likely, we are dealing with the remains of one or more biblical codices, it is probable that fol. 9 originally preceded fol. 8 before being reused in a Qurʾānic manuscript. Two folios, now probably lost, can be assumed to have separated them. Like fol. 8, fol. 9 corresponds to the top of a leaf, with its Coptic text written back to tail compared to the Arabic text. Traces of the prickings that marked the intercolumn are still visible. Here too the inner column of text is preserved in most of its width while the outer column is mostly lost. Very little of the recto remains legible, so much so that

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134. The line-cutting of texts here is conjectural, at least for vv. 22–23, which are too illegible to permit us to determine the beginning and end of lines. They are so hard to read that I prefer to put them between brackets. Verse 24 is a little safer.
its identification mainly relies on the identification of its verso alongside the interpretation of the very few letters still discernible on the recto. As things stand, therefore, the identification of the recto’s content as being Isa 40:15–16 remains purely hypothetical.

We can however safely identify the inner column of the verso to have contained Isa 40:22a. The same text is also attested in the manuscript of the Pierpont Morgan Library M568 and in a late manuscript kept at the Vatican Library, published by Ciasca.135 I should like to add that traces seem to remain in the top margin of the folio. I am unable to read their content; their place in the fragment suggest that they could have been remnants of ancient decoration or pagination, but it remains impossible to be more specific.

Fol. 9b, column a = Is 40:21–25136

Fol. 9b, column b = Is 40:26–27

135. Borgia Copto 109, cass. XXIII, fasc. 99. This is a paper lectionary to which Schüssler attributed the siglum Sa 108L; see Karlheinz Schüssler, Das sahidische Alte und Neue Testament 1.4 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2000), 49–69. The publishers of these leaves and the scholars who have studied them have suggested datings between the twelfth century and about 1400. The Isaiah passage that concerns us has been published in Agostino Ciasca, Sacrorum Bibliorum fragmenta copto-sahidica Musei Borgiani, vol. 2 (Roma: Typis eiusdem S. Congregationis, 1889), 239.

136. The first lines of the column being illegible, it must be supposed that the folio began a little before the beginning of v. 21. In this edition of the verso, as indicated between brackets, most of column a is reconstructed. The Coptic text is established on the basis of the Copto-Arabic fragment and ms. M.

137. It seems that there are too many letters for this lacuna. The manuscript may here have contained a variant in the biblical text that I cannot determine exactly.
Column a: [21 has it not been declared to yo]u from th[e beginning? Have you not known the found]ations of the [earth? 22 It is he who] holds the [circle of the earth, and those who dwe]ll in [it are like grasshoppers, who has set up heaven like a vault, and stretched it out as a tent to live in, 23 who has appointed rulers to rule for naught and has made the earth as nothing. 24 For they will not sow, nor will they plant, neither will their root take root in the earth; he blew upon them, and they withered, and a tempest will carry them off like brushwood. 25 Now therefore to whom did you liken me and will I be made equal? said the Holy One].

Column b: 26 Look up on high with your eyes, and see: Who has constructed all these? He who bring[s out] his ornamentation by number, [he will] call them all by name, because [of] abundant glory, and by might of strength, nothing has escaped you. 27 For do not say, [O Jacob], and why have you [spo]ken, O Israel, “My [way] was [h]idden from Go[d, and] Go[d has taken away my judgement and has withdrawn”?[).

Conclusions and Perspectives for the History of Scribal Practices

In nineteenth century scholarship, the erasure of ancient texts was viewed as an “unfortunate injury to the historical record.”138 This view has since been superseded and replaced by a study of the practices, reception, and transmission of ancient texts. In line with this shift in focus, the present study has examined how the palimpsest under consideration may have moved around its historical milieu and what light it may shed on scribal practices in the late antique Middle East. It has been shown that CQP has Egyptian

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Orientation of script</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↓</td>
<td>No superior or inferior margin is clearly distinguishable. Column a is preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Arabic↓</td>
<td>No superior or inferior margin is clearly distinguishable. Column a is preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↓</td>
<td>No superior or inferior margin is clearly distinguishable. Column a is preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Arabic↓</td>
<td>No superior or inferior margin is clearly distinguishable. Column a is preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Deut 9:5–6a</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>No inferior margin is preserved, and it is impossible to determine the presence or absence of parts of the superior margin. It seems that traces of letters appear in most of the top part of the fragment, but a small part of the superior margin may also remain. Column a is preserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Deut 9:14b–16a</td>
<td>Arabic↑</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* There seems to be almost an entire line of text before the first line I am able to read; it probably contained ΕΗΛΑΤΕ ΕΠΟΥΕ ΠΝΙΓ ΑΥΩ, but I remain uncertain.

** The lacuna corresponds to about four lines of which I can read only a few letters, which only partially match editions of the biblical text.
<table>
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<th>Orientation of script</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>Deut 6:3-4</td>
<td>No superior or inferior margin distinguishable with certainty. Column a (recto) is almost entirely preserved (except for ca. three letters at the beginning of the column). The intercolumn is visible in its entirety. Of column b, one can make out the beginning (about two letters) and 18 lines with 11–14 letters each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>Deut 6:16-17</td>
<td>Very few letters are legible, perhaps yielding: ωⲣⲉⲡⲧⲛⲁⲩⲱⲉⲕⲁⲥⲉⲧⲛⲉⲃⲕⲧⲁⲑⲉⲛ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>I am only able to distinguish a few letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>I am only able to distinguish a few letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Almost entirely illegible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Almost entirely illegible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<th>Content</th>
<th>Orientation of script</th>
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<tr>
<td>7a</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↓ Bottom part of a leaf (margin visible, traces of pricking). Column a (recto) has mostly disappeared; column b is almost entirely preserved.</td>
<td>column b: 1–3 lines?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↓</td>
<td>col. a: 2–3 l.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Isa 42:7b–9a</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑ This is the top inner part of a folio. Column a and the intercolumn are preserved, while column b is lost. The Coptic margin shows traces of pricking. The leaf is sown into the qur’ānic codex by its Coptic top margin.</td>
<td>edited above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Isa 42:23–24</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>partially edited above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Isa 40:15–16</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑ This is the top inner part of a folio. Column a and the intercolumn are preserved, while column b is lost. The Coptic margin shows traces of pricking. The leaf is sown into the qur’ānic codex by its Coptic top margin.</td>
<td>very few letters identifiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b</td>
<td>Isa 40:21–22a; 40:26–27</td>
<td>Coptic↓ Arabic↑</td>
<td>edited above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
origins, its leaves having most likely belonged to a multi-volume Bible produced within the Coptic community before the rise of Islam, probably during the sixth century. What happened to it during the following century or so remains a mystery. Perhaps it was damaged and discarded and lay buried in an ancient rubbish dump for some time. It is also possible that it was dismembered and that its leaves were sold locally to a Muslim scribe around the middle of the second/eighth century.

This is the moment when the parchment leaves studied here came to life again as they were recycled for writing down the Qurʾān. The manuscript’s small size and the recycling of the parchment reveal that economic constraints also affected the production of Qurʾānic manuscripts. CQP contrasts with large and well-executed copies of the Qurʾān that functioned as showpieces exhibited in public mosques. By contrast, our palimpsest, like other copies of a small size or on cheaper materials, may have been produced for another purpose: to be read by Muslims of average means. This does not however mean that less costly manuscripts like CQP were produced or intended for strictly private use. Whatever the applicable economic constraints, the palimpsest does not stand out from the aesthetic and textual norms of Qurʾānic handwriting of its period. It seems obvious that professional scribes, such as Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 130/748) in Iraq, would have supplied Qurʾānic manuscripts at different prices. The palimpsest and related manuscripts discussed in this study show that Egypt was a center of Qurʾānic manuscript production in the middle of the second/eighth century and earlier. These Egyptian artifacts reveal moreover that the written transmission of the Qurʾānic text in this region and period was already centralized and highly controlled by firm scribal norms.

Last but not least, CQP reminds us of the physical proximity between the material cultures of Muslim and Christian scribes in the Egyptian provinces of the early Islamic centuries. It raises the issue of cultural interactions between the new material culture of the Qurʾān and the centuries-old book tradition of the Bible. There are obvious material correlations between the two, implying that both groups of scribes did not ignore each other. Fortunately, CQP is not the only surviving witness of such a multicultural environment in Egypt. These materials imply that the Qurʾān’s manuscript transmission was not isolated from other material cultures but instead shared in the multicultural and pluralistic history of the late antique world. It seems appropriate to highlight a symbolically fraught textual coincidence that underlines this point: the lex talionis contained in Q al-Māʾidah 5:45,
documented by one of the palimpsest’s folios (2a), has a clear precedent in the same biblical book that is attested by the palimpsest’s lower layer, namely, in Deuteronomy 19:21.